

Now, if safety lapses can lead to the *Columbia* Shuttle accident and the failure to guarantee the safe return of our brave astronauts from mission STS-107, just how much are we willing to gamble on the safety of the 2 million Americans who travel in our skies every day?

The lessons of privatization are hard learned and should not be ignored. Other countries have tried this already and they have paid the price. Australia, Canada, and Great Britain all have privatized systems that did not live up to the promised benefits of privatization. Just to clear the air, privatization means that these tasks will be handed over to companies whose mission it is to make a profit and who will try to do the job at the cheapest prices.

A member of Parliament of the British House of Commons named Gwyneth Dunwoody said this:

The privatization of the United Kingdom's air traffic control system was a grave mistake, and one that the United States can still avoid making. British air traffic controllers are among the best in the world, and they fought tooth and nail to keep ATC in the public sector.

The public sector means in government.

They insisted that the sale of the national air traffic services would lead to a collapse in morale, the unwise introduction of inadequate and unreliable equipment, and an increasing danger of catastrophic accidents. The Government did not listen and went ahead. They were wrong and the air traffic controllers were right.

Costs have gone up and safety has gone down since Great Britain adopted privatization. Near misses have increased by 50 percent and delays have increased by 20 percent. Do we want to risk near misses in the skies over America? Do we want to take a chance because we can buy security on the cheap? I do not think so, and I am going to do whatever I can to prevent that from happening.

The British Government has already had to bail out the privatized air traffic control company twice. When is this administration going to take off the ideological blinders from its eyes and learn the lessons taught to our British friends?

President Bush himself should be quite familiar with the importance of our air traffic control workforce. Last month, on September 10, the day before the second-year anniversary of the most tragic attack on our soil, the President traveled to a fundraiser in Florida. As Air Force One, the President's airplane, approached for a landing, air traffic controllers noticed an unidentified car on the runway that Air Force One was attempting to land on. Disaster was avoided because of the quick reaction of those air traffic controllers in Jacksonville.

Despite these lessons, the administration has pushed hard to privatize through the contract tower program which has been beneficial to many small airports across the country. Most

of these 200 or so small airports would not otherwise have an air traffic control tower.

There are many more. Some 4,000 small airports exist that could use this program, but the administration wants to use the program to privatize some of the busiest airports in the country. Examples of some of the busiest airport towers: They want to privatize the eighth busiest airport in the country, Van Nuys, CA, almost a half a million flight operations in 2002; the 18th most busy, the Denver Centennial Airport in Colorado, over 400,000 flight operations in 2002. In fact, those two airports are busier than Washington Dulles, which was 23rd with 392,000 flight operations in the year 2002. We look at Arizona, the 24th busiest airport, Phoenix/Deer Valley Municipal Airport, 390,000 flight operations in 2002. The list goes on. We are looking at the 50 busiest airports in the country.

Some may notice that two airports were dropped out of the list, both in the State of Alaska. Now, why is Alaska exempted? The chairman of the Transportation Committee in the House of Representatives is Congressman YOUNG. He is chairman of the committee because he has seniority. Well, he made sure that the two Alaskan airports that were listed for privatization were taken off the list. They are smart in Alaska. They know they have to fight to protect themselves. They are a long distance from the mainland, but they are smart enough to exempt themselves from this dangerous privatization scheme.

I do not believe the safety of every other airport in our national aviation system is any less important than the safety at Alaska's airports.

The White House interfered in our process and altered language in the FAA conference bill so they would be explicitly allowed to privatize some of the busiest air traffic control towers in the world. It is for this reason that I and many of my colleagues are not going to agree. We are not going to accept any FAA reauthorization conference report without language prohibiting privatization of our air traffic control system. I am going to fight until the will of the Senate is heeded. Others have pledged to do the same thing.

I want to make clear to my colleagues that we passed legislation to prevent privatization of the air traffic control system. It was bipartisan. There were 11 Republicans and the remainder Democrats who passed that bill.

The system is made up of many important parts, including the air traffic controllers themselves, those who run the towers, the technicians who have the responsibility to certify that the equipment is working, and the flight service station controllers who communicate directly with the pilots as they make their way to their destination.

As FAA conference leaders did not abide by the will of both the Senate

and the House to prohibit privatizing our air traffic control systems, my colleague, Senator ROCKEFELLER, the ranking member of the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Aviation, and I, introduced S. 1618. It is the Temporary Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act of 2003. This legislation extends funding for reauthorization for all aviation programs, including the AIP program, for 6 months, and it also addresses the immediate safety and security needs while FAA conference leaders work with us to go back and fix the problems they created for themselves in the FAA conference report.

But, unfortunately, my unanimous consent request to pass this extension was objected to by the majority. In the meantime, our Government operates under a continuing resolution that means we couldn't get our work done in time, that as fiscal year 2003 ended we were not prepared, though we knew a year in advance that the new fiscal year was going to start with October 1, 2003. I find it outrageous that the Republican leadership in Congress would effectively punish our economy with further job losses in order to afford the opportunity to the White House to wage their ideological battles.

I am appalled they would intentionally zero out the Airport Improvement Program, again, the program that keeps updating our airports across the country. It is over \$3 billion. I am appalled they would intentionally zero that out, zero out the opportunity to put Federal funds in there for airport construction programs, to muscle their plan through the Congress. It is not going to happen.

Our economy cannot stand to lose any more jobs, and using a continuing resolution to cancel a program which will provide \$3.4 billion in AIP funding is just irresponsible.

I hope when we get this bill up my colleagues will work with us so we can do the right thing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

IRAQ

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I want to share a few thoughts. I will probably talk about it next week on the supplemental for our activities in Iraq.

I congratulate and will be forthright in my support for the military men and women who are serving so extraordinarily well and Ambassador Bremer for his leadership in an effort to create a new government in Iraq where the